

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. **Applicant/Contact name and address:**
Missoula County
200 W Broadway St
Missoula, MT 59802-4216
2. **Type of action:** Change Application 76H 30161876
3. **Water source name:** Groundwater
4. **Location affected by project:** E2NW Section 31, T13N, R19W, Missoula County and the Bitterroot River downstream of the southern boundary of Section 31, T13N, R19W
5. **Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:** The Applicant is seeking to retire irrigation on 7 acres of turf grass which have historically been supplied by water from Provisional Permit 76H 4927-00. The water left in the groundwater aquifer as a result of this retirement will reduce historical depletions to the Bitterroot River previously effected through pre-stream capture. The Applicant intends to use the water thus made available for mitigation to offset the depletions to the Bitterroot River arising from Provisional Permit 76M 30151075.

The DNRC shall issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.
6. **Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:**
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (DFWP)
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Montana Natural Heritage Program Species of Concern Report
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wetlands Inventory

Part II. Environmental Review

Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - *Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.*

As the proposed source of supply is groundwater, it is not identified as a dewatered stream by DFWP. The Bitterroot River, which has been identified as a hydraulically connected surface water, has not been identified as a dewatered stream in this location. This change will result in additional water being made available in the Bitterroot River.

Determination: No significant impact

Water quality - *Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.*

The source of the proposed change is groundwater. The Bitterroot River from Eightmile Creek to the confluence with the Clark Fork River is considered an impaired water by the Montana DEQ and is listed as not fully supporting aquatic life. The proposed change will result in a reduction of historical depletions to the Bitterroot River and is not anticipated to negatively affect water quality.

Determination: No significant impact

Groundwater - *Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.*

The proposed change will result in a decrease in diverted volume under Provisional Permit 76H 4927-00. The Bitterroot River is hydraulically connected to the aquifer from which water is pumped under this permit and is expected to see an increase in flows amounting to 12.7 AF per year.

Determination: No significant impact

DIVERSION WORKS - *Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.*

The means of diversion is already extant and operational. This change application will result in decreased diversion of water. Impacts to river channels, flow regime, barriers, riparian areas, dams, and well construction are not anticipated.

Determination: No significant impact

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any "species of special concern," or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or "species of special concern."

The Montana Natural Heritage Program website was reviewed to determine if there are any "threatened" or "endangered" fish, wildlife, plants, or aquatic species that could potentially be impacted by this project. "Species of special concern" were also included in this search.

According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, 16 animal species of concern and 3 plant species may possibly be found in the general location of the area of potential impact. Two of these species are listed as "threatened" by the USFWS in this area: the Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and the Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*).

Animal species of concern include:

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)
Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*)
Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*)
Cassin's Finch (*Haemorhous cassinii*)
Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)
Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)
Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*)
Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*)
Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)
Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*)
Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*)
Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee (*Bombus suckleyi*)
Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)
Veery (*Catharus fuscenscens*)
Worn Stygobromid (*Stygobromus tritus*)

Plant species of concern include:

Spiny-spore Quillwort (*Isoetes echinospora*)
Stalk-leaved Monkeyflower (*Mimulus ampliatus*)
Toothcup (*Rotala ramosior*)

The proposed change will result in a reduction of depletions to the Bitterroot River, and is not anticipated to result in negative effects to any of the above-listed species.

Determination: No significant impact

Wetlands - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

No wetlands were identified within the historically irrigated area. Wetlands have been identified along and adjoined to the Bitterroot River. No significant impacts to these wetlands are anticipated.

Determination: No significant impact

Ponds - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

No ponds exist within the project area.

Determination: No significant impact

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.

The reduction of irrigation will not affect soil quality nor cause saline seep.

Determination: No significant impact

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.

The proposed change is for the DNRC to recognize that certain areas of Fort Missoula Regional Park are no longer irrigated. These areas have already been retired; the change recognizes this in the Department's files. As a result, no new physical changes to the vegetative environment are anticipated, nor is the establishment or spread of noxious weeds expected.

Determination: No significant impact

AIR QUALITY - Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.

No deterioration of air quality or adverse air quality impacts from increased air pollutants are expected due to this project.

Determination: No significant impact

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

Determination: N/A – Project not located on State or Federal Lands

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

No additional impacts to land, water, or energy are anticipated.

Determination: No significant impact

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

This project does not violate any known locally adopted environmental plans or regulations.

Determination: No significant impact

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

The proposed project will not inhibit, alter, or impair access to present recreational opportunities in the area. The project is not expected to create any significant pollution, noise, or traffic congestion in the area that may alter the quality of recreational opportunities. The proposed place of use and diversion do not exist on land designated as wilderness.

Determination: No significant impact

HUMAN HEALTH - *Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.*

No impacts on human health are anticipated as a result of this project.

Determination: No significant impact

PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes___ No X *If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.*

Determination: No significant impact

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? None identified
 - (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? None identified
 - (c) Existing land uses? None identified
 - (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? None identified
 - (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? None identified
 - (f) Demands for government services? None identified
 - (g) Industrial and commercial activity? None identified
 - (h) Utilities? None identified
 - (i) Transportation? None identified
 - (j) Safety? None identified
 - (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? None identified
2. ***Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:***
- Secondary Impacts: None identified
- Cumulative Impacts: None identified
3. ***Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*** None
4. ***Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:*** None identified

PART III. Conclusion

- 1. ***Preferred Alternative***
Authorize the proposed change if the Applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.
- 2. ***Comments and Responses***
None

3. ***Finding:***

Yes___ No_X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: No significant impacts were identified

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Benjamin Thomas

Title: Water Conservation Specialist

Date: 10/15/2025